Address at the unveiling of the statue of General Shields

ADDRESS AT THE UNVEILING OF THE STATUE OF GENERAL SHIELDS, IN THE Capitol of Minnesota , October 20, 1914.

BY ARCHBISHOP JOHN IRELAND.

To James Shields, the soldier, the statesman, the jurist, honor is paid by the citizenship of Minnesota. A monument of him is enthroned in the hall of the Capitol of the State, there to perpetuate his name and memory, to the intent that coming generations may know him, and, knowing him, emulate in the service of humanity and of country his deeds of noble and disinterested patriotism and valor.

No unusual occurrence is it in America that a monument be built to pay honor to James Shields. In the Hall of Fame, beneath the dome of the Capitol of the nation in Washington, stands his figure, placed there by the State of Illinois, when it was summoned to name to America's admiring vision two of its most distinguished citizens. A statue also has been erected to him by the State of Missouri, in the public square of the City of Carrollton. Minnesota may well, without fear or peril of blame, do as its sister states, Illinois and Missouri, have done,—extol the fame of “the Jurist, the Statesman, the Soldier,” James Shields,—and do so with especial joyousness, inasmuch as at one period of his career he was a citizen and a loyal servant of our commonwealth.

From 1855 to 1860 James Shields claimed Minnesota as his home. While commissioner of the Federal Land Office in Washington, he had learnt of the fertility of our fields and the salubriousness of our climate, and had resolved, that, when freed from the toils of public office, he would draw hither colonists from the ranks of his fellow Irishmen in the Eastern States and in Ireland itself, less likely to find elsewhere than in Minnesota

peace and prosperity. He became one of the proprietors and 732 founders of what is now the flourishing City of Faribault, and thence sent far and wide invitations to settlement in the neighboring districts. The fruits of his labors as a colonizer are the townships of Shieldsville, Erin, Kilkenny, Montgomery, in our Counties of Rice and Le Sueur, where reside hundreds of industrious and wealthy farmers, of whose good American citizenship their Celtic names give sure guarantee. When the first legislature of the newly organized State of Minnesota convened in 1858, it chose, as its representatives in the Senate of the United States, Henry M. Rice and James Shields,—the continent-wide fame of the latter commending him to the electors in lieu of more immediate labors in Minnesota itself. As the result of the drawing of lots between the new senators, James Shields took to himself the short term of two years. This expired, the majority in the State Legislature meanwhile having changed its political coloring, he ceased his service in Washington, and shortly afterward sought a new home in California.

James Shields was the Irishman and the American,—the Irishman by birth, temper, and education, the American by loyalty and service,—the Irishman and the American to a typical degree. His whole career is summed up in those words, the Irishman and the American.

I give the outlines of his life. He was born in Ireland in 1806, of honorable and respected lineage. His direct ancestor, with four sons, fought on the losing side in the battle of the Boyne,—one of those sons later joining the army of Spain, and there rising from one honor to another until finally he was commissioned the Captain General of Cuba. An immediate uncle of our hero was a soldier in America's revolutionary war and in that of 1812. James decidedly sprung from a family in which fear of the battlefield was unknown. In his native isle he received, mainly through the tutorship of another uncle, a priest who had been a professor in the College of Maynooth, a liberal education. At the age of sixteen he emigrated from Ireland in search of fortune in other lands. Arrived in America, he first adopted a seafaring life, afterwards serving as a soldier in the Seminole War, thence pushing westward to Kaskaskia, at the time the Territorial capital of Illinois. There he was

the school-teacher, 733 the lawyer, and quickly the office-holder. He served four years in the State Legislature, was elected State Auditor, and in 1843 succeeded Stephen A. Douglas as Justice of the Supreme Court of Illinois. Two years later he was named by President James K. Polk, Commissioner of the Land Office in Washington. This office he resigned to become the brigadier general of volunteers, to be soon brevetted major general, in the Mexican War. The war over, he was named by President Polk governor of the newly organized Territory of Oregon,—a position, however, which he did not accept—a higher distinction coming to him from the State of Illinois. Illinois chose him as its representative in the Senate of the United States, where he served the full term of six years. In 1855 he was in Minnesota, the colonizer, and later its representative in the Senate of the United States. The outbreak of the Civil War found him a resident of California. At once he buckled on his warrior sword, and was appointed by President Lincoln brigadier general, soon to be major general of the volunteer army. In 1863 he resigned his commission in the army, owing to misunderstandings with the Secretary of War, Mr. Stanton. Missouri now became his home. Here he was Adjutant General of the State, and later was chosen again to membership in the Senate of the United States, occupying the seat vacated through the death of Senator Bogy. Later he filled two terms in the State Legislature. The last years of his life were spent in cultivating a modest farm near Carrollton, in Missouri, and giving lectures in different parts of the country in aid of charitable and religious works. He died in 1879, leaving to his wife and children all that he was able to leave to them as the pecuniary result of his many years of civil and militant office-holding—his few acres of farm land, the diamond-studded swords which had been given to him, one by the State of South Carolina, the other by the State of Illinois,—and his blessing.

A wonderful career, that of James Shields, in the picturesqueness of its varieties, in the confidences reposed in him by his fellow Americans from Illinois to Washington City, from Minnesota to Missouri, in the enthusiasms his name everywhere was wont to evoke; and wonderful, equally so, in the talents he 734 displayed wherever the call to office placed

him, magnificently so in the martial skill and bravery of which his sword was ever the token upon fields of gore and glory. Picturesqueness it is, seldom equalled in the fortunes of other heroes—though so many and so illustrious—in the annals of America. Only recall the chief head-lines in the narratives of his career,—Soldier and Statesman; Jurist and Orator; Legislator in the chief cities of two states; Senator of the United States from three of its commonwealths; Soldier in three American wars.

Fellow Americans, we announce a noble name, when that of James Shields is spoken; we glorify a noble memory, when we fling out his figure to the gratitude and the admiration of Americans of today, of Americans of tomorrow.

To what do we attribute these manifold honors, bedecking the years in the career of James Shields?

It is plain from the record that James Shields was no intriguer in politics, no shrewd, insidious wire-puller. He was ignorant of the arts of combinations and machineries. He was the single-minded and the open-tongued citizen. He simply showed himself as he was, willing to take what was offered, unwilling, unable even, to plan for favor of preferment. He was the old-fashioned knight, without fear, but, also, without reproach. Nor, as distinction of office came, was he cunning in schemes to retain it. He did his duty, regardless of consequences, regardless of the dictates of the political party that had entrusted him with power, bidding friends and foes to judge his deeds on their bare desert. At all times, and in all stations, he was James Shields, to be taken, or to be pushed aside, for what he was, for what he was believed to be.

To what, then, is due his career? To personal character and qualifications; to value of service rendered, whatever the position to which he was lifted; to the willingness of America to recognize and reward merit, wherever merit is discernible.

Shields was the good man. His private life was above reproach. No weakness was his in the use of drink; no moral stain ever darkened his escutcheon. In him deep religious

conviction begot the personal and social virtues, and brightened their uses and practices. I might, perhaps, blame the impetuosity 735 of a moment which led him to the brink of a duel with a famed citizen, Abraham Lincoln. Let the false notions of honor, prevailing at the time, excuse the one and the other.

Shields was the gentleman, in manner polished and refined; in the maintenance of principle, the soul itself of honor and integrity. A base proposal would have at once awakened in him indignant ire. To give service, to friend or to foe, was the imperious dictate of his code of chivalry.

We read of the typical Irish gentleman. That was Shields, warm Celtic blood ever coursing in his veins, kingly Irish traditions ever ruling heart and head. He had the Celtic faults, — he was emotional, maybe now and then too quick in decision, too impatient, perhaps, for his own welfare, too much of a rover and a seeker of new things. But at times those very faults served him well, as when his sword was brandished on the battlefield. And with Celtic faults he had all the Celtic virtues. Brave he was and valorous, generous of gift and service, the high-tempered knight, whose flashing passage across the ranks of fellow-men sheds over our world of dull matter and selfish plodding the sunshine of uplifting poetry, the sweetness of the supernal life.

Shields was the scholar. His early liberal education served him well, and continuous study through the years increased its brilliancy and power. And, of course, he was the orator, holding, as charmed victims of his fiery phrase and his orphean voice, no less the sages of legislative and senatorial halls than the ruder and less thinking multitudes of voters of Kaskaskia, Vandalia, and Springfield.

Rushed from one occupation to another, from one political office to another, he was at home, whatever the duties assigned to him. His talents were most varied in kind. As lawyer and as justice of the Supreme Court of Illinois, he had his reward in the genial companionship and the esteem of great men, of whom Illinois was at the time the plentiful

parent, and all America the proud beneficiary,—Abraham Lincon, John M. Palmer, E. B. Washburn, Stephen T. Logan, to name but the few. As Auditor of the State of Illinois, he wrested from confusion and uncertainty its financial budget, and placed it on a secure and enviable 736 foundation. In legislative halls he was the skilled debater, the magnetic speaker, the promotor of whatever was wise and just, himself the author of several useful and far-reaching measures. In Washington they were the days of Webster, Clay, Calhoun, Sumner, Jefferson Davis, Breckenridge. In no way was Shields below the exalted standard then set to the lawmakers of America. I note but a few of the famed issues amid which he was the consistent champion of righteous patriotism,—that of allotment of free homes on the lands of the national domain to soldiers of the Mexican War, and to actual settlers, that opposing the extension of slavery to newly organized states, that of the preservation of the nation as one and indivisible.

His own party was opposed to him in the question of the extension of slavery. The admission of California to statehood was the occasion. Shields' greatest speech entered into the debate. I quote a passage, showing not only his firmness of resolve with regard to the extension of slavery, but also his prophetic view of things to come, of things that are today: “Sir, they are laying the foundations of a great empire on the shores of the Pacific, —a mighty empire, an empire that at some future day will carry your flag, your commerce, your arts and your arms into Asia, and through China, Hindustan, and Persia, into Western Europe. Talk about carrying slavery there, of imposing such a blight upon that people, of withering their strength and paralyzing their energies by such an institution! No, Sir, such a thing was never intended by God, and will never be permitted by man.”

As to the perpetuation of the Union, his voice always rose loud amid the threats of secession, then thundering through senate and chamber,—always proclaiming that secession would be the blackest of crimes, the most stupid of follies, that never should America permit or endure it.

Always James Shields was the truest of patriots, the most earnest and loyal of Americans. Country was his idol. To country he gallantly sacrificed personal interest, dictate of party, hope and prospect of popular applause and approval. It is the undoubted and indubitable fact: From every office, of 737 the many held by him, at one time or another, under the gift of one state or of another, Shields always went back to private life with clean hands,—poor in the possession of all emoluments, save that of honor for faithful service.

But, whatever his other achievements, it is the field of war where James Shields is to be seen at his best. There his Celtic nature bursts forward in special efflorescence. Above all else he is the soldier. As the soldier, especially, we salute him, we honor him. All the virtues of the soldier are in him in plenary apportionment,—skill of strategy, firmness of disciplinary mastership, magic power of control of troops, undaunted courage, a dash in attack that bewilders, an endurance of pain and fatigue that secures victory when defeat is most threatening. The vanguard is always his coveted place, there brandishing his sword, compelling by sheer magnetism of example others to follow his lead. Wounded—he was wounded in almost every engagement—he still fights on, so long as strength to move remains. Compelled to retire, he frets like the caged lion, until again he has leaped into the saddle. Warriors of Napoleon, Ney, Murat, McDonald,—how fittingly Shields should have ridden with them! I must not tarry in details. Let praise from General Scott suffice. In his report of the battle of Cerro Gordo, the commander-in-chief wrote: “General Shields, a commander of activity, zeal and talent, is, I fear, if not dead, mortally wounded.” Later he said: “Shields' brigade, bravely assaulting the left, carried the rear battery (five guns) on the Islapa road, and added materially in the rout of the enemy.” And again: “The brigade so gallantly led by General Shields, and after his fall by Colonel Baker,deserves commendation for fine behavior and success.”

Scarcely convalescent, Shields is again on his charger in the march to the City of Mexico—always the undaunted soldier. In the battle of Contreras, “Shields,” said General Scott, “by the wise disposition of his brigade and gallant activity, contributed much to the general

results. He held masses of cavalry and infantry, supported by artillery, in check below him, and captured hundreds, with one general (Mendoza) of those who fled from above." "At Cherubusco," I still quote General 47 738 Scott, "Shields concentrated the division about a hamlet and determined the attack in front. The battle was long, hot and varied; but ultimately success crowned the zeal and gallantry of our troops, ably directed by their distinguished commander, General Shields." At Chapultepec, his horse was killed under him; Shields fought on foot, bareheaded, in shirt sleeves, leading his brigade, sword in hand. Yet another wound, but no cessation of rush and combat. Shields' command led the van into the City of Mexico, and first planted the Stars and Stripes on the walls of the Belen Gate.

Came the great war,—the war for the salvation of the Union. Shields, a resident of California, bounded across the continent, joyous to be again a soldier. He was commissioned brigadier and assigned to the Shenandoah Valley. At Winchester he met Stonewall Jackson, fated there to meet under the blow of our own hero his only defeat. Shields again was wounded; much of the engagement he directed from his blood-stained cot, in the rear of his command; Colonel Kimball, who led the final charge, reported, after the victory, that in all details he carried out the plans and directions of his leader. Shields' division alone had confronted Jackson's much larger army, and had won the victory. If later, at Port Republic, Jackson did not receive another severe defeat, it was because orders given by General Shields to burn the bridge across Aquia Creek, for some unexplained reason, had not been obeyed. This is the testimony of General Oates, an officer under Stonewall Jackson, speaking at the unveiling of the Shields Statue in the Capitol at Washington: "Had General Shields' orders been obeyed, there was no escape for Jackson." The orders obeyed, the bridge burnt, one of the most decisive victories of the War should have been gained by General Shields.

General Shields resigned from the army March 28, 1863. I take his act to have been a mistake. He and the Secretary of War, Mr. Stanton, were not in accord. Shields should have borne with patience Mr. Stanton's displeasure and gone forward in spite of

temporary opposition, gone whither his merits bade him go, forward to greater victories and higher rewards. It was a mistake of his Celtic temperament, to which we must 739 grant indulgence, in view of the deeds of glory, of which elsewhere it was the generous prompter.

General Shields is the soldier of three wars. He barely missed being the soldier of four wars. While a resident of Minnesota he heard of an Indian outbreak near the southern border line of the State. Quickly his appeal echoed through Faribault and Shieldsville; a troop of his Irish Colonists rallied around him, with whatever arms they could gather together. Soon General Shields and his braves were on the field of strife, but, alas for his expectation of that war, peace had already been proclaimed.

So, when building a monument to James Shields, we have built it to the soldier, General Shields. Have you done well, Companions of the Loyal Legion, Comrades of the Grand Army of the Republic, in setting up before the eyes of present and future generations, in Minnesota's Hall of Fame, the man who rushed to war, in defence of country's rights and country's honor? Most decidedly so. Peace is the ideal condition of human society, —all things, even war itself, must tend to peace; but God avert from America the ruin of its commonwealth, the plunder of its territory, the dishonor to its flag, from which war alone could have wrested it. Rather war, a hundred times, than evils such as those. Never do we know when menace may be nigh; never, consequently, must America's sons be void of the martial spirit, which bids America ever be free, ever secure, ever honored and respected. The names of our military heroes are safeguards of patriotism; their memories are perennial founts of its life and vigor.

Another factor in the career of General Shields was America itself. America gave to him inspiration and blessed his labor. America rewarded his merits.

General Shields was by birth an Irishman, by religion a Catholic. By lifelong and most loyal service, by the oft offered sacrifice of his blood, he was the American. Never did the

Star-spangled Banner look down upon more sincere and braver patriotism than that which fired the heart and electrified the sword of General James Shields. America put faith in the plighted troth and the deeds of General Shields; accepted him 740 into the fullness of sonship, accorded to him all opportunities, all rights, all privileges, within the gift of the Star-spangled Banner. General Shields was the citizen of America; it was all that he should have desired, all that he could have needed for himself, to fall or to stand. Right nobly did he stand.

Now and then whispers pass through the air that men like to General Shields in birthplace and in religions belief are not the truest of Americans. Such whispers are the vilest of falsehoods. In contradiction, we evoke into speech the battlefields reddened by the armies of America, the lakes and oceans furrowed by its navies; we evoke into speech the monument erected this day, within the Capitol of Minnesota, to the name and the fame of General James Shields.

Back again, General Shields, to Minnesota, back with the memories of your services to Minnesota itself, with the glories in other states of the Union,—back with the triumphant flags of Cerro Cordo, and of Winchester,—back, the true and loyal son and servant of the Republic of the United States of America. Our Welcome—the welcome of our admiration and love—is yours.